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GENERAL FEATURES OF SEMITIC RELIGIONS.*

By Prof. MORRIS JASTROW, Jr.,
The University of Pennsylvania.

The Semites: Who They were and Their General Character—The Four Great Semitic Cultures: the Babylonio-Assyrian, the Phœnician, the Hebrew, the Arabic—Their Influence on the Course of Civilization—The Distinctive Features of Each and the Traits they Possess in Common—Renan's Hypothesis of their Tendency to Monotheism—Method of Ascertaining the Religious Ideas among the Early Semites previous to the Rise of Culture among Them—Survivals in Customs and Rites—The Testimony borne by Language—The Value of Traditions and Legendary Lore—The Mental Horizon of the Early Semites—Nomadic and Agricultural Life—Their Views of Nature and Animal Life—Identification of all Varieties of Life the Keynote to an Understanding of their Thought and Customs—Institutions and Rites of the Semites—Animism and Totemism among Them—The Theory of "Sympathetic Magic" as an Explanation of Image and Object Worship—Sanctity and *Taboo*—Sacred Objects, Places and Persons—The Significance of the "Name" among Them—Talismans and Sacred Formulæ—Gods and Spirits—The Blood Covenant: its Scope and Various Forms—Sacrifice and Tribute—Expiatory Rites—Views of Death and the Future Life—Religion and the Social Life—The Family and the Tribe—The Religious Significance of Family Events and Tribal Gatherings—The *Ger* and the *Goël*—Retrospect—Concluding Remarks.

SELECTED REFERENCES TO THE LITERATURE OF THE GENERAL SUBJECT.

- W. ROBERTSON SMITH.—*The Religion of the Semites*. I, The Fundamental Institutions (London and New York, 1890). This work, which is the first serious attempt at a comprehensive study of the subject, will be complete in three parts, but even the first volume by itself is a perfect treasure-house of well-arranged facts and suggestive discussions on these facts. In addition to the value of the work for the student of Semitic religions, it marks, as Mr. Frazier well says, "A new departure in the historical study of religion."
- TH. NOELDEKE's article, "The Semitic Languages," in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.
- FR. HOMMEL.—*Die Semitischen Völker und Sprachen* (Leipzig, 1883).
- ERNEST RENAN.—*Histoire Générale et Système Comparé des Langues Sémitiques* (5th edition. Paris, 1878); especially the first part (pp. 1-100,) which contains a discussion of the general character of the Semites.
- Against Renan's hypothesis of the tendency to Monotheism among the Semites, see CHWOLSON, *Die Semitischen Völker* (Berlin, 1872).
- ERNEST RENAN.—*De la Part des Peuples Sémitiques dans l'Histoire de la Civilisation* (7th edition, Paris, 1875).

* The Syllabus of a lecture delivered in Association Hall, Philadelphia, in a series on Ancient Religions, under the direction of the Lecture Association of the University of Pennsylvania. The broad treatment and the suggestive references will be found helpful.

BABYLONIO-ASSYRIAN.

- A. H. SAYCE.—*Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians* (Hibbert Lectures). London, Williams and Norgate, 1887.
- C. B. TIELE.—*Babylonisch-Assyrische Geschichte* (Gotha, Perthes, 1886); especially Chapter V, *Die Babylonisch-Assyrische Kultur* (pp. 485-616).

PHENICIA.

- R. PIETSCHMAN.—*Geschichte der Phönizier* (Berlin, Grote, 1889).

HEBREW.

In view of the many still unsolved problems in ancient Israelitish history, no wholly satisfactory treatment of the subject has as yet appeared. Stanley's *History of the Jewish Church* is still of value, but has in many essential points been superseded by subsequent researches. Scholars are pretty generally agreed in regarding as the standard work at present Bernard Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Grote, Berlin, 1887-88, 2 vols). An English translation of this work is a desideratum. It embodies the ascertained results of modern scholarship with a not too large addition of personal hypothesis. For those already familiar with the subject, Ernest Renan's scholarly and brilliant work, *Histoire du Peuple d' Israel* (Paris, 1886-1890), the third volume of which has just appeared, will prove most valuable and profoundly suggestive. At the same time, it is proper to caution those approaching the subject for the first time against certain theories in the work peculiar to Renan and which must be viewed as such. An English translation of the first two volumes under the title, *History of Israel*, has been published by Roberts Bros., Boston, and the third volume is announced.

JULIUS WELLHAUSEN.—*Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Edinburgh, 1884).

W. ROBERTSON SMITH.—*The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (New York, 1881).

A. KUENEN.—*The Religion of Israel to the Fall of the Jewish State*, 3 vols. (London, 1882).

JOHN FENTON.—*Early Hebrew Life* (London, 1870).

[This list might be indefinitely extended, and only the standard works of a general character have been included.]

ARABIC.

W. ROBERTSON SMITH.—*Marriage and Kinship in Early Arabia* (Williams and Norgate, 1887).

JULIUS WELLHAUSEN.—*Reste Arabischen Heidenthums* (Berlin, Reimer, 1887).

A. VON KREMER.—*Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen* (Wien, Braunmueller, 1875. 2 vols.).

THEODOR NOELDEKE.—*Das Leben Muhammed's* (Hanover, Ruempler, 1863).

A capital sketch. See also the same author's excellent article on the Coran, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th edition. The most complete biographies of Mohammed are those of Aloys Sprenger in German, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammed*, 3 vols., 2d edition, Berlin, 1869; and Sir William Muir, *The Life of Mahomet and the History of Islam*, 4 vols.; London, 1858-61. Of the two, the German is the more impartial. The standard work on Islam in general is now August Mueller, *Der Islam im Morgen-und-Abendlande* (Berlin, Grote, 1888). 2 vols.